

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 REYKJA 00813 151811Z

53

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C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 0813

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: NAVAL STATION MAINTENANCE PROJECTS CAUSING POLITICAL PROBLEMS

1. SUMMARY: KEFLAVIK NAVAL STATION "SELF-HELP" PROJECTS CAUSING LOCAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH GOI LEADERS CONSIDER COULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT ATTITUDE OF ICELANDERS TOWARD IDF. WE ARE TRYING TO WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT MUTUALLY AGREEABLE TO THE IDF AND THE ICELANDIC GOVT. THIS TELEGRAM IS SIMPLY TO ALERT THE ADDRESSES, PARTICULARLY DEFENSE, ABOUT THE SENSITIVITY OF THE "SELF-HELP" PROJECTS. UNFORTUNATELY, ICELANDIC FEELINGS ON THIS SUBJECT, NO MATTER HOW UNREALISTIC OR ILLOGICAL THEY ARE FROM USG POINT OF VIEW, CANNOT BE IGNORED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE KEFLAVIK NAVY BASE PROGRAM OF "SELF-HELP" WHEREBY MILITARY PERSONNEL ON THE BASE PERFORM CERTAIN MINOR REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE WHICH ARE COMMON AND LEGITIMATE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL TO PERFORM AT PROBABLY EVERY BASE IN THE USA AND ELSEWHERE, IS CREATING A POLITICAL STORM IN ICELAND. THIS SITUATION UNFORTUNATELY ARISES BECAUSE OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN ICELAND WHERE UNTIL ABOUT A YEAR AGO

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 REYKJA 00813 151811Z

THERE WAS A SCARCITY OF LABOR. COMPLAINTS FROM LABOR UNIONS AND

UNEMPLOYED ICELANDIC SKILLED AND UNSKILLED LABORERS HAVE CAUSED GOVT LEADERS TO TAKE NOTICE OF A SITUATION WHICH NORMALLY WOULD GO UNNOTICED. THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED PEOPLES ALLIANCE AND ITS PRESS AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PRESS HAVE DISTORED AND PUBLICIZED THE SITUATION. ALSO, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ALTHING FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, IN AN EDITORIAL IN THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY DAILY NEWSPAPER TIMINN HAS IMPLIED THAT THE USG IS VIOLATING THE TERMS OF THE DEFENSE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING OF OCTOBER 22, 1974 (MOU). THIS, OF COURSE, IS UNTRUE.

3. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO THE FONMIN HAD APPROVED CERTAIN SELF-HELP PROJECTS ON WHICH, BECAUSE OF POLITICAL PRESSURE, HE IS NOW HEDGING AND IMPLYING THAT THE BASE HAS GONE BEYOND THE EXTENT OF HIS APPROVAL. THE STAUCHEST DEFENDERS OF IDF RETENTION IN ICELAND ARE NOW JOINING IN THE COMPLAINT AND HAVE CONTACTED ME TO WARN THAT IF THE BASE CONTINUES ON THE PRESENT LEVEL WITH ITS SELF-HELP PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY THE VISIBLE OUTDOOR PROJECTS SUCH AS FILLING POTHOLE IN THE ROAD, PAINTING HANGAR SIDINGS, REPAIRING ROOFS, ETC., WE WILL BE CAUSING A SERIOUS POLITICAL ISSUE THAT WILL IN THE LONG AS WELL AS SHORT RUN BE CONTRARY TO THE INTERESTS OF THE BASE AND THE PRESENT FRIENDLY GOI LEADERSHIP.

4. OVER THE WEEKEND I LEARNED THAT THE FONMIN HAD DIRECTED THE ICELANDIC SIDE OF THE U.S.-ICELANDIC DEFENSE COUNCIL AT ITS JULY 15TH MEETING TO OFFICIALLY SUBMIT "GUIDELINES" TO THE BASE GOVERNING MAINTENANCE WORK PERFORMED BY MILITARY PERSONNEL. A COPY GIVEN TO ME IN CONFIDENCE YESTERDAY INDICATES THAT THESE "GUIDELINES" ARE REALLY DIRECTIVES WHICH WOULD BE TOO RESTRICTIVE AND WHICH, IN MY JUDGMENT, WOULD EXACERBATE, RATHER THAN ALLEVIATE THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS THAT THE GUIDELINES WERE DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE. I IMMEDIATELY PROTESTED ORALLY TO THE FONMIN WHO AGREED TO POSTPONE SUBMISSION OR ISSUANCE OF THE "GUIDELINES" FOR AT LEAST A WEEK IN ORDER TO GIVE COMICEDEFOR AND MYSELF AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE COUNTERPROPOSALS.

5. IN THE PAST FEW DAYS THE PRIME MINISTER, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY, AND CERTAIN MFA OFFICIALS ALL SEPARATELY AND ALL IN CONFIDENCE, HAVE MADE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN TO ME ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE MATTER, WHICH THEY NO LONGER CATEGORIZE AS A "TECHNICAL" MATTER. IN MY DISCUSSION WITH THE FONMIN YESTERDAY, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 REYKJA 00813 151811Z

AND AS A CONDITION OF HIS POSTPONING THE "GUIDELINES" THE FONMIN HAS REQUESTED THAT "SELF-HELP" BE CONSIDERED A POLICY ISSUE WITHIN THE MOU SUFFICIENTLY IMPORTANT FOR HIM AND FOR ME "AS SIGNATORIES OF THE MOU" AND FOR COMICEDEFOR AND MFA CHIEF DEFENSE NEGOTIATOR HANS ANDERSEN TO BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN ITS RESOLUTION. COMICEDEFOR AND I PLAN TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER IN DEPTH WITH REAR ADMIRAL WALTON DURING HIS VISIT HERE THIS WEEK. ADDRESSEES SHOULD BE AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS MAY HAVE TO PLAY

A LARGE FACTOR IN THE RESOLUTION OF THIS MATTER.
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